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PREPARATIONS FOR THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

DIALOGUE SESSIONS WITH MAJOR GROUPS

Summary report of the synthesis session (18 April 1997)

Chairman: Ambassador Bagher Asadi (Islamic Republic of Iran), Vice-Chairman, Commission on Sustainable Development

During the final dialogue session, representatives of the following organizations provided a brief recap of the views expressed during their dialogue session and made recommendations for future dialogue sessions:

International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) (for scientific and technological communities)

Youth Caucus (for children and youth)

Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) (for women)

Maori Congress (for indigenous people)

International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) (for workers and trade unions)

Instituo del Tercer Mundo (for non-governmental organizations)

International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) (for local authorities)

International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) (for farmers)

International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) (for business and industry)

All presenters felt that the dialogue sessions were useful as a first step towards further sharing of views on problems and solutions as well as building of greater consensus around Agenda 21 objectives. Several presenters expressed disappointment with the low attendance of Governments in the dialogue sessions.

A performance by the New York City Labor Choir preceded the question/dialogue segment of the programme.

DIALOGUE

Representatives of the following Governments made statements: Canada, Finland, France, Peru, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America. Statements were also made by representatives of the following bodies: South Pacific Forum Secretariat, United Nations Association-United States of America (UNA-USA), International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), ICFTU, NGO Steering Committee of the Commission on Sustainable Development and Human Rights and Peace Caucus.

The statements expressed appreciation for the dialogue sessions, particularly in terms of showing the progress made through major groups' activities during the first five years of Agenda 21 implementation. Low attendance was attributed to the numerous meetings and events rather than to lack of interest in sharing views with major groups (Sweden). Major group panellists were asked about the extent to which they engaged in dialogue with each other (Finland) and about which methods they utilized to mobilize their constituencies to act upon Agenda 21 objectives (France). It was suggested that universities should be more involved in exchanging information (Peru). The South Pacific Forum announced that it would distribute the dialogue session summaries among its member States.

The crucial role of young people in furthering the goals of Agenda 21 was emphasized (UNA-USA). Local Agenda 21 initiatives were pointed to as a vehicle for mobilizing local Governments and communities at the local level (ICLEI). It was pointed out that the Commission on Sustainable Development was a perfect global forum in which to explore solutions as the next phase moved increasingly towards more action and implementation (WBCSD). The fact was also highlighted that achieving sustainable development was a slow process in which continued dialogue with major groups was crucial (NGO Steering Committee of the Commission on Sustainable Development). It was suggested that in future the Commission on Sustainable Development reporting process should involve major groups to a greater extent, as well as focus on the human rights and military aspects of sustainable development (Human Rights and Peace Caucus). The trade union representative called attention to the ongoing silence about workplace issues in Agenda 21 follow-up (ICFTU).

Suggestions and proposals for future dialogue sessions

All participants made suggestions for future dialogue sessions or similar vehicles with respect to exchange of views between Governments and major groups. The following proposals were put forth:

- Focus dialogue sessions on specific thematic issues (Canada, Sweden, United Kingdom, ICSU, Instituto del Tercer Mundo, Maori Congress). Possible themes mentioned parallelled the key issues singled out in the high-level segment of the current session of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

- Encourage a more interactive format (Canada).

- Schedule dialogue sessions outside the negotiating hours (Sweden) or when more delegations are available to attend them (United States).

- Involve other sectors of society such as those comprising artists, writers, religious communities (Sweden).

- Continue hearing the views of all major groups (United States).

- Ensure more participation from the South (Sweden).

- Enable dialogue between the major groups in a systematic way for the purpose of finding balanced approaches to the costs, benefits and risks involved in sustainable development (WBCSD).

- Establish dialogue sessions as a tradition of the Commission on Sustainable Development and encourage use of this mechanism by other bodies of the United Nations system (NGO Steering Committee of the Commission on Sustainable Development).